OPINION

BY MUNA KHAN

Family ties

THE saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' traces its origin to several African countries but it gained Global North popularity when Hillary Clinton chose it as a title for her book on how you needed a community to raise a child. What was a 'duh' moment for us was apparently a surprising revelation in the US, to the then largely white majority, whose children were reared by parents, maybe some family, childcare centres, or, if they could afford it, nannies.

Their version of community is vastly different to ours. Even though I grew up abroad, I knew instinctively that my Filipino best friend's mother in grade school was 'aunty'. Our extended family included other Pakistani families and one special aunty can scold me today, like she could 40 years ago.

As we grew older, and the trend of sleepovers became the norm, my parents gave in to our demands, but there was always a check of sorts they wanted to do, much to our annoyance. It wasn't about our safety per se, because we lived privileged and sheltered lives in suburban areas but about who will be there, who will take care of us, where are the parents from? I was only allowed to go on my first sleepover, aged 10, because the girl's father was from Cameroon. They are like us, they said, without explaining how they came to these decisions.

We were raised by an extended family of Pakistani uncles and aunties, Ethiopian nannies, Palestinian, Lebanese and Indian (imagine!) aunties and uncles — all of whom watched over us.

But not everyone understands this concept of what constitutes family as the recent exchange between Zohran Mamdani and his detractors showed. Mamdani referenced his 'hijab-wearing' aunt who feared for her safety on the subway following 9/11. He was calling out his opponent Andrew Cuomo for being Islamophobic. Mamdani's detractors found a photo of his father's sister without a hijab and accused him of lying, with the right-wing newspaper *New York Post* leading the charge.

"How can you, Zohran Mamdani, convince New Yorkers to go and vote for you when you just said you lied?" asked a radio host. "It's not a lie," Mamdani responded. "My father's cousin is my aunt. That is how I referred to her all my life."

This seemingly irrelevant issue became a hot topic for days with immigrants explaining what 'aunty' means to them. That one group can find it so alien an idea was not surprising but the attitudes in the media were. Because it showed the media was not representing audiences fairly.

Mamdani is clearly a product of communal parenting — that is his appeal to the scores of immigrant communities he reached out to and spoke to and made them feel seen, heard. His policies also reflect building community, caring for each other, not being taken advantage of. And it's unsettling everyone across the media.

You may remember the *New York Times*' ridiculous attempt to take down Mamdani for identifying as Asian *and* African on his college application. Then there's the *Washington Post* who titled their editorial as 'Zohran Mamdani drops the mask' following his victory. They described him as Generalissimo Mamdani and his acceptance speech as "laced with identity politics and seething with resentment". They declared his politics wasn't about unifying but "about identifying class enemies — from landlords who take advantage of tenants to 'the bosses' who exploit workers — and then crushing them". Mamdani's actual speech was anything but that. The *Wall Street Journal* published 50 editorials attacking Mamdani since June. The right-wing media has predicted that New Yorkers will "flee communism" and seek refuge in Miami.

> Mamdani is a product of communal parenting.

Earlier this month, the *Columbia Journalism Review* reported on how the legacy media was being "weird and hostile" to Mamdani. They share a common aim, the writer notes: "Their commitment to keep change modest, to keep reform within reason, to keep the basic arrangement of things steady." Things won't remain 'steady' as demographics change and younger audiences challenge the status quo especially in policymaking that has so far been rooted in anti-poor laws.

Mamdani changed the very nature of the electorate by getting new voters to register and by targeting the young. When he threw his hat in the ring he was seen as 'a protest candidate' with no chance of winning, but as the Brookings Institute noted, he had two assets "skilled organising and social media mastery". I would add he had an army of aunties and uncles behind him too — the taxi drivers, the bodega owners that Mamdani thanked for example — who dreamt of a better future for their children.

The media would be foolish to continue adversarial reporting on Mamdani because they stand to lose audiences. Instead they should learn from Mamdani and connect with their readers to tell stories that matter to them. ■

The writer is a journalism instructor.
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BY RABIYA JAVERI AGHA

Revisiting tolerance

EACH year, the International Day for Tolerance arrives as a quiet prompt to reflect on what it means to live together despite our differences. Yet in Pakistan, the word 'tolerance' feels worn thin by misuse. It has come to signify little more than the ability to endure one another, when what our time demands is something much deeper: an active embrace of pluralism, of coexistence grounded in equality and respect.

The idea of tolerance is not foreign to our culture. Our land has long been home to faiths, languages, and traditions that existed side by side. The Indus Valley's ancient diversity, the spiritual egalitarianism of Sufism, and the ethos of shared spaces across centuries all testify that coexistence is part of our civilisational inheritance. From the temples of Sindh to the gurdwaras of Punjab, from churches that stand beside mosques in old neighbourhoods to the shared reverence for shrines that transcend sectarian lines, Pakistan's history offers countless reminders of an inclusive moral imagination.

Yet, in recent decades, that imagination has contracted. The social and political space once available for difference has shrunk under the weight of intolerance, impunity, and fear. What we have witnessed, from the desecration of places of worship to the targeting of individuals for their beliefs, marks not just a human rights crisis but a spiritual one. The question is not whether we can tolerate difference, but whether we can still see the humanity in those who differ from us.

At the National Commission for Human Rights, we have repeatedly drawn attention to the steady erosion of religious freedom in Pakistan. In the past few years, there have been multiple attacks on minority communities, each one shaking the fragile promise of equality enshrined in our Constitution. Such tragedies reflect a larger malaise: one in which bigotry goes unchecked, social media amplifies hate, and justice moves too slowly to restore trust.

Tolerance, in its truest sense, is not about mere silence. It is not about looking away from injustice in the name of peace. It is about recognising the inherent dignity of every human being, regardless of belief, and ensuring that this recognition is reflected in the laws, policies, and practices of the state. It means protecting the rights of those with whom we disagree, not because we share their faith, but because we share their humanity.

Our challenge, then, is to transform tolerance from a defensive posture into an affirmative principle of governance and citizenship. This transformation requires three shifts.

Firstly, we must address the climate of impunity that enables any form of persecution. Every act of violence against a minority faith must be met with credible investigation and swift prosecution. The selective enforcement of law corrodes public confidence and emboldens hate. When perpetrators of religiously motivated violence walk free, intolerance becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Secondly, education must play a restorative role. The narratives we teach our children shape how they perceive those around them. School curricula must celebrate the plurality of Pakistan's history rather than erase it. Students should learn about the contributions of Christian teachers, Hindu businessmen, Sikh scholars, minority scientists and poets who helped build this country. Tolerance begins with knowledge: of the other, and of oneself.

> The idea of tolerance is not foreign to our culture.

Finally, we must rebuild the social and civic spaces where communities can meet not as adversaries but as neighbours. Local administrations, religious leaders, and community elders all have a part to play in nurturing trust. Dialogue cannot be imposed from above; it must be practised in daily life. In classrooms, in marketplaces, in village councils, and in the corridors of policymaking alike.

Pakistan's constitutional promise is unambiguous. Article 20 guarantees every citizen "the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion". However, the persistence of discriminatory laws, misuse of blasphemy provisions, and administrative inertia has often meant that these guarantees remain paper promises.

The test of democracy lies not in how it protects the majority but in how it safeguards minorities. The work of tolerance begins in policy but must be completed in the human heart. Laws may protect difference, but only empathy can sustain it. Hence, the International Day for Tolerance is not an occasion for self-congratulation. It is a reminder of the work left undone. ■

The writer is the chairperson of the National Commission for Human Rights.

FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1975 | Fifty years ago

India's opposition

UNITED NATIONS: India told the First Committee … that it could not agree to any international regulation of Peaceful Nuclear Explosions (PNEs) unless the nuclear-weapon powers agree to stop their nuclear weapon tests. Participating in disarmament matters, Ambassador Brajesh Mishra said the nuclear-weapon powers should also agree to the same system of international regulation of their nuclear activities including PNEs as would be applicable to non-nuclear-weapon powers. — News agencies

[Meanwhile, as reported by our staff reporter from Karachi,] Begum Naseem Wali Khan … accused the Government of "trying to create a political vacuum in the country". Addressing students at the Karachi University … the wife of the defunct NAP chief said Pathan traditions required women to stay indoor "unless it was hell". She said if men were imprisoned, Pathan women would come out and struggle "shoulder to shoulder with you for the establishment of democracy. The unfortunate part of the story is that everybody who comes into power thinks that he is Pakistan by himself", she added. … The people's goal must be the establishment of democracy and "the salvaging of all institutions … of Pakistani society".

1950 | Seventy-five years ago

Fall contradicted

NEW DELHI: Lhasa has not fallen to Chinese Red forces, reports [news agency] staff correspondent. After several days of … reports of Lhasa's fall [,] capitulation of Tibet and … whirlwind advance of Chinese forces in Tibet … comes an official report from [the] Bharati Mission at Lhasa … denying [the] fall of [the] Tibetan capital.

According to official reports from the Bharati Mission, even advance of Chinese forces has been slowed down. Giamda, 200 miles east of Lhasa which was claimed to have been captured by Chinese forces, was this evening [Nov 15] reported to be still in Tibetan hands. Tibetan forces opposing Chinese Army were stated to be stationed at Charigno… . — News agencies

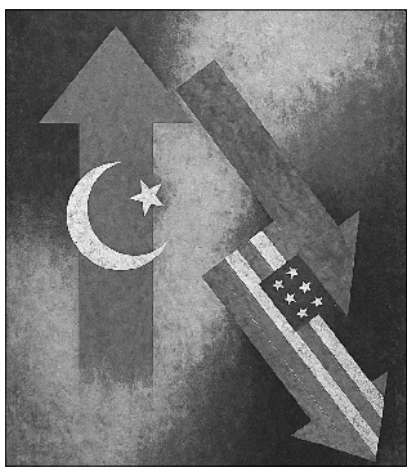
[Meanwhile, as reported by news agencies in Cairo,] political quarters … are … disturbed at … news of the establishment of "Israel" military bases in Akaba area. An official spokesman told [news agency] that "Israel" had established these bases in preparation for aggression and for smuggling agents into the Sinai desert. Since Sinai is an important oil field, "Israel" spies hope to brew trouble there, he added. — News agencies

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@dawn.com

Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.

In one area, we are far ahead of the US



THIS is with reference to the report 'President gives assent to 27th Amendment after Senate nod' (Nov 14). Pakistan now stands shoulder to shoulder with the United States. The people of Pakistan no longer need to dream of a US green card or citizenship, for in one field at least we are now truly at par with the US — and are on course to even surpass it at some stage. That field, however, is not technology, economy, or education. It is far more sacred, sensitive and vital: the Constitution.

The US Constitution was written back in 1787, was ratified in 1788, and became operational in 1789 when New Hampshire became the ninth state to adopt it. In the last 237 years, the US has made 27 amendments to that founding document — each carefully debated, weighed and passed after broad consensus. Pakistan has reached the same number in a mere 52 years; more than 4.5 times the pace at which the US could achieve the 'milestone'. And, these 52 years do not include the many years when the Constitution was suspended.

The 1973 Constitution was a rare moment of national unity. Unanimously passed by all political parties on April 10, 1973, it was hailed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then prime minister, as a document born of consensus — a reflection of Islamic, federal and democratic principles, and a continuation of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's vision. However, just four years later, on July 5, 1977, that same Constitution was suspended by the martial law regime. What followed is a bitter constitutional history — one in which the supreme law of the land became a plaything in the hands of individuals and regimes. Abraham Lincoln, the man who famously explained democracy as a government 'of the people, by the people, for the people', had once cautioned US legislators against interfering 'with anything' in the Constitution. "That must be maintained, for it is the only safeguard of our liberties," he had said. We seem to be in need of paying heed to such a warning.

Aamir Aqil
Lahore

Political silence

WHAT has been perplexing throughout the passage of the 27th Amendment to the Constitution is the bizarre silence of the country's political opposition. Given that the amendment touched upon several contentious issues, a strong and diverse opposition in parliament would have given the government a run for its money, especially when passing an amendment requires a two-thirds majority in both houses separately.

The political parties' willingness to allow the incumbents and the powers that be to fundamentally alter the Constitution has roots in their focus on somehow regaining political power and on securing acquittal for their leaders. The obstinate insistence of the main political party on either being in power or refusing to work for the nation deserves due condemnation.

Since the ouster of the party from power, it has insisted on an utter disregard for the political process and has refused to be a fierce opposition — that it could — and stand in the way of the hybrid regime to prevent it from taking retrogressive actions against democracy in the country. This makes the party complicit in the democratic backsliding that has been 'achieved' by the hybrid dispensation ruling the country for the last few years.

Abdul Karim
Karachi

Mourning and resolve

THIS is with reference to the report 'Afghan link being probed as terror revisits capital after years' (Nov 12). The attack on the Judicial Complex in Islamabad stands as one of the darkest and most tragic days in Pakistan's judicial history. The cowardly act was an assault on the rule of law, justice and constitutional values that bind the entire nation. The tragedy must awaken our national conscience. The attack revealed alarming security vulnerabilities that must be addressed without delay. The government, law-enforcement agencies, and judicial administration must ensure comprehensive security protocols across all courts and legal premises. No lawyer, judge, or litigant should ever again enter a courtroom fearing violence. Every perpetrator, abettor and facilitator must be made to face justice.

Let Oct 10 be remembered not just for mourning, but also for the nation's renewed commitment to fight off terrorism in all its forms. The bench and the bar stand united against terrorism, intolerance and all threats to Pakistan's judiciary.

Asad Ullah Taimur Muhmand
Islamabad

Economic DNA

PAKISTAN'S economy is not just weak; it is genetically flawed. The finance minister's recent remarks about "fixing the DNA of the economy" captured a painful truth: the country's financial system was born from a colonial legacy that was designed to protect the elite and exploit the masses. That same DNA continues to drive today's culture of privilege and tax evasion. For decades, Pakistan's wealthy have enjoyed the state's benefits without sharing its burdens. Less than two per cent of the population pays taxes, and most of them happen to be salaried employees whose payments are deducted automatically at source. Meanwhile, business tycoons and traders, living in luxury and flaunting wealth online, contribute little or nothing. The recent drive by the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), marking lifestyle audits and tracking efforts, marks a necessary correction, but true reforms will only come to surface when the untouchables are held accountable.

The injustice is clear: the poor and those in the middle class, already crushed by inflation, pay the price for the elite's evasion through indirect taxes on fuel, power and basic goods. This upside-down system forces the weakest to fund the strongest. Fixing this economic DNA means more than enforcement; it requires moral reconstruction.

Taxation must be fair, transparent and citizen-friendly. People should see their contributions being used to build hospitals, schools and infrastructure. People should not see their contributions being used to feed corruption and elitism.

Pakistan, founded on the principles of justice and equality, must reclaim those core values. When contribution replaces evasion and accountability replaces privilege, only then can we say that the national economy's DNA has truly been repaired.

Gulab Umid
Turbat

▶ **COASTAL DIPLOMACY:** This is with reference to the letter "Geopolitics along Pakistan's coast" (Nov 9). Though not confirmed by officials, media reports about the possibility of Pakistan having pitched the United States a deep sea port at Pasni means that in the shadow of Gwadar's Chinese cranes, the country might well be playing its most dangerous card yet. Being just 100 miles from Iran, Pasni sits at the maritime crossroads, where oil tankers, rare earth element (REE) supply chains and naval power converge. Any American presence there would surely mean a chance for the US to counter China's vast Belt and Road jewel at Gwadar, and to outflank Iran's Chabahar. This would be the ultimate aim of the US.
Muhammad Aized
Gujranwala

▶ **CRISIS OF OWNERSHIP:** This year so far, 30 new cases of polio have surfaced in Pakistan. In fighting the virus, a number of countries had involved communities and civil society organisations in the decision-making process about polio campaigns. On the other hand, we have hardly seen any such attempt in Pakistan to curb the polio menace. Every polio campaign is run solely by the official machinery. Like most government initiatives, the drive against polio is facing a crisis of ownership by the community. There are many lessons in the efforts of India, China and other heavily populated countries about polio eradication. Our policymakers must learn from them.
Aijaz Ali Khuwaja
Karachi

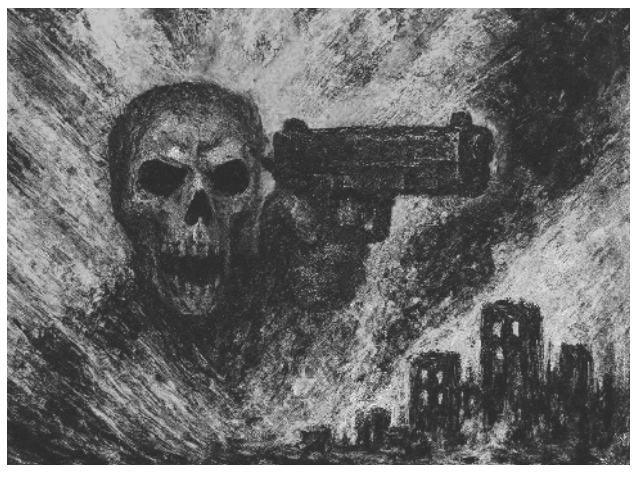
▶ **LAWLESSNESS:** The cases of theft and household robberies in Karachi's Defence Housing Authority (DHA) areas have alarmingly increased over the last few years. It has been more than a year since my house was targeted by criminals in Phase II Extension, but the culprits have not been apprehended till date. As the traces after theft indicate, the whole network of these criminals is based on domestic staff, like housemaids. However, police and DHA vigilance teams have failed to take any action in this regard, making robberies a daily routine.
Prof (Dr) Syed Tafazzul Hyder Zaidi
Karachi

Operation against terrorists is our Hobson's choice

THIS is with reference to the report 'Terror attack at cadet college foiled, students, staff rescued' (Nov 12). The foiled attack on Cadet College Wanna was another attempt by the terrorists to target the innocent youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) while they were busy in an academic setting. We must be grateful to the Almighty that the terrorists miserably failed in their nefarious designs owing to the timely move of our valiant forces who quickly neutralised the terrorists before they could harm the cadets, teachers or the members of the administrative staff. It was a replica of the attack that was carried out by terrorists belonging to the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) at the Army Public School (APS) in the KP capital of Peshawar back in 2014, inflicting heavy casualties by killing young students and teachers before being eliminated. As a result, Pakistan Army had carried out famous Zarb-i-Azb operation in North Waziristan, during which it was able to destroy terrorists' hideouts and their sleeper cells.

However, some wise man having a soft corner for these terrorists decided to allow about 40,000 of them to resettle in KP. Since then, the province has been facing terrorist activities. Now again, voices are being raised in KP to indulge in negotiations with these very forces instead of crushing them with military action.

The fact of the matter is that in addition to condemning the heinous acts of violence,



intolerance and terrorism in the country, we should increase state-level efforts to dilute the threat itself. Merely blaming the foreign agencies is never really going to be enough. We should move logically ahead.

Malik ul Quddoos
Karachi

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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